

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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May 30, 2013

Mr. Jared Blumenfeld
Regional Administrator; Pacific Southwest Region
United States Environmental Protection Agency
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

Dear Mr. Blumenfeld:

I am writing to express my serious concern about contamination of the Palos Verdes Shelf and the threat it poses to human health and the aquatic ecosystem off the coast of Los Angeles. DDT and PCBs from the site, discharged long ago by the Montrose Chemical Corporation, have harmed fish, birds, and marine mammals and made locally caught fish unsafe to eat. Bald eagles in the area are only now beginning to recover.

Recently, efforts to contain this contamination have faced some uncertainty because of unusual monitoring results from a 2009 sediment study suggesting a significant decrease between 2004 and 2009 in the amount of DDT in the sediment on the ocean floor. These results were not consistent with past data, which showed a rate of decline of only 1% or 2% per year. Experts have called the results a fluke, and no explanation for the sudden decrease has been found.

Before any changes are considered in the cleanup approach for this site, the 2009 monitoring data must be understood, and additional data must be collected. I understand that EPA intends to conduct another sediment study at the site this year, collecting and analyzing samples from, at a minimum, all of the locations that were sampled in 2009. This resampling is essential to understanding the results of the 2009 study.

How the resampling is done is as important as doing the resampling. The cleanup of the Palos Verdes Shelf will suffer a severe setback if potential deficiencies in the 2009 samples are repeated. Local communities have fought for the cleanup of this site for decades, and their hard-won victories should not be called into question by a single study, the results of which cannot be explained by experts in the field.

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I have consulted with experts about the kind of monitoring necessary to protect the coast and Palos Verdes Shelf. To ensure that the new monitoring meets the highest standards, the new monitoring should at a minimum:

- Include depth profiles for all samples;
- Require analysis of samples at multiple laboratories for verification;
- Include more sites than the 2009 study, including multiple sites in the same area;
- Support the long overdue sediment fluctuation model to facilitate understanding of the fate of the contaminants and the forces moving them out of the sediment.

Decisions that affect the cleanup of the Palos Verdes Shelf need to be based on a thorough scientific understanding of the extent of the contamination. I hope we can work together to ensure that the uncertainty created by the unusual monitoring results from 2009 is resolved quickly and dispositively.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member